

The  www.independent.co.uk

.... SINCE 1986. NUMBER 7808. THURSDAY 20 OCTOBER 2011 £1

INDEPENDENT

**Dale Farm burns - but
police fight fire with fire**
Pages 4-5



**Centuries of open
justice threatened**

**Is Ricky
Gervais the
new Jim
Davidson?**



Police under fire for Taser use in the final battle of Dale Farm

Officers take control of Traveller site but come under scrutiny following violent confrontations

By KEVIN RAWLINSON

Police are facing criticism over their "heavy-handed" approach to clearing barricades at Dale Farm last night after a morning of violent confrontations in which two people were shot with Tasers.

Clashes between police and protesters continued at Dale Farm last night after a morning of violent confrontations in which two people were shot with Tasers.

The law reform group Justice expressed concern at the use of the weapons, but police said officers had been threatened with "serious violence".

Police said they had secured the area and removed protesters from a 40ft-high scaffolding tower which had

been erected at the main gate to the site. A total of 23 arrests were made throughout the day. "We are in control of the whole site. It is calm. The tension is now reduced," said Superintendent Trevor Roe, of Essex Police.

Police broke down a fence at the back of the site, and protesters pelted them with bricks, bottles and other debris and built barricades. An unoccupied caravan was set alight and two explosions were heard as it burnt. No one was hurt.

Supt Roe said the two officers who fired Tasers had been trying "to protect themselves". He said: "They carry personal protective equipment which includes the Taser and they just naturally reacted as they are trained individuals to operate that device."

Acknowledging that the use of Tasers is not recommended as a "public order tactic", he added: "This was an isolated incident where officers were threatened directly."

TASERS THE RULES

The use of Tasers by police divides opinion. Human rights groups claim they are "potentially lethal", and responsible for hundreds of deaths in the US, while the Association of Chief Police Officers says they have a significant deterrent effect.

In 2008, 10,000 Tasers were issued to police. They fire two electric barbs up to 35 feet and deliver a disabling 50,000-volt shock, which can penetrate clothing.

The police remain acutely sensitive to public doubts about the Taser. The Independent Police Complaints Commission recently introduced rules making officers forward all complaints about Tasers to the police watchdog.

TOM PECK

Supt Roe continued: "The first officers on the site were attacked with missiles being thrown, including rocks and liquids. These officers were fully equipped to deal with this situation."

He said police had gone into the site as Basildon Council was worried that violence would break out once the clearance began.

Residents and protesters accused them of being heavy-handed and of carrying out the eviction on behalf of bailiffs. "I have been through a lot of evictions but I have never seen anything like this."

"To see riot police on our doorsteps is shocking. We are terrified of the police," said Kathleen McCarthy, who lived at Dale Farm.

The clearances mark the climax of a 10-year legal battle between the council and the community. The residents had won a last-minute injunction as bailiffs massed at the gates, but a High Court judge ruled this week

that the clearances could go ahead. At least 50 officers led the operation to clear the site, and at least one person was taken to hospital. Basildon Council officials now estimate the cost of the eviction could rise to £18m.

Tony Ball, leader of Basildon Council, condemned the violence. He said: "The premeditated and organised scenes of violence that we have already seen, with protesters throwing rocks and bricks, threatening police with iron bars and setting fire to a caravan, are shocking."

"These are utterly disgraceful scenes and demonstrate the fact some so-called supporters were always intent on violence. Nonetheless we are going to press on with this operation with our partners in a safe, dignified and humane way and will uphold the law."



The battle is over but the struggle remains
LEADING ARTICLE, PAGE 11



A protester is removed (main); Travellers watch as police enter the site

'The council said I'd get a home, but it's just a hostel'

Families complain their eviction is waste of public funds, reports Kevin Rawlinson

Michelle Fox has lived at Dale Farm for 10 years. She has four children and was cradling her youngest, John, in her arms as the bailiffs arrived yesterday.

"I was travelling before I came here," Ms Fox, 38, said. "And I will be on the road again after they kick me out. I will be homeless. The council says they offered me a home, but it was just a hostel."

"How can they think it is right to force a woman with four children to live in a hostel? I have been evicted many times before, I have been moved on from car parks and fields, but it has never been like this. We have never had riot police burst in before."

The stretch of green-belt land at Dale Farm has been a figurative battleground for years. But yesterday, it really looked like one. Burning barricades were erected and police clashed with protesters. A caravan burnt to the ground and masked protesters threw missiles at riot officers. Caught in the middle is a community with no idea where it is to go. A protester sat on the floor with a sign that said: "No judge's ruling or law can make this eviction just."

Dale Farm is separated roughly in half, with one section of 54 plots deemed illegal. The courts have ordered that all but five of the plots in the illegal half can be cleared by bailiffs.

Cornelius Sheridan, who has terminal cancer, lives on one of the five plots being spared from eviction. But that doesn't mean he has been spared from the anguish. He was taken out of his home as bailiffs began to enter. The power to the site - which runs his defibrillator - was cut. Two days earlier, he had been admitted to hospital with a severe asthma attack; he came back because he was afraid of what

would happen to his legal case. It is estimated the cost of evicting the residents of Dale Farm will reach £18m in police and council costs. Legal costs on his side have been considerable. Basildon Council's Conservative leader, Tony Ball, said Dale Farm residents had been "lucky on borrowed time" and urged them to leave "peacefully and safely and in order".

He added: "The so-called supporters should also pack up their belongings and leave the site. I have the Travellers' best interest at heart: they will still leave the area now or confine activities to helping the Travellers to leave over the coming days."

Chief Superintendent Tony said: "A lot of missiles, fire and other objects had been stored. Intelligence suggested there was a serious disorder if the site was entered."

But Travellers also complain of the police violence they had witnessed and the waste of public funds. Mary Sheridan said: "This eviction is going to cost so much they could have bought us all bedroom houses, but we would want them. We just want to stay here. It is difficult to believe there is much in resources could be put into kicking us out of our homes."

"They could have left us. We in the mucky fields, we put barbed wire around our homes and all we ask for is an electricity supply and a cup of water."

The Bishop of Chelmsford, Stephen Cottrell, said: "This action does not solve the problem but moves it somewhere else."